United Nations A/C.4/71/SR.19

General Assembly
Seventy-first session

Official Records

Distr.: General
13 January 2017

Original: English

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 19th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 31 October 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Drobnjak ..... (Croatia)

Contents

Agenda item 50: Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent as soon as possible, under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, to the Chief of the Documents Control Unit (srcorrections@un.org), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org/).

16-18927 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 50: Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/71/315, A/71/321, A/71/352, A/71/355, A/71/364 and A/71/392)

1. **Mr. Perera** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and introducing the report of the Special Committee (A/71/352), said that in the absence of an Israeli Government response to the Committee's request to access the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Committee had held consultations with Member States in Geneva, followed by a visit to Amman in May 2016. There, civil society representatives, victims and witnesses of Israeli violations, as well as Palestinian and United Nations officials, had highlighted the daily violence and humiliation suffered by Palestinian men, women and children under the Israeli occupation. The fact that the issues and incidents described in the report were repetitive of previous Committee reports was a reflection of an unchanging, and at times worsening, reality on the ground.

2. The foremost concern was that Israel was pursuing the expansion of settlements and related activities in a clear violation of international law. Other harmful Israeli practices included the seizure of land, retroactive legalization of outposts, demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures, denial of Palestinian building permits, restrictions of movement or access to livelihoods, and lack of accountability for settler violence. Having received throughout the years of its existence information that confirmed the patterns of human rights violations associated with the Israeli occupation and its inextricably linked settlement enterprise, the Committee firmly believed that the phenomenon remained at the core of human rights violations in the occupied territories. It also shared the view, expressed by the Quartet and human rights organizations, that Israel's continuing policy of illegal settlement expansion was eroding the viability of the two-State solution. During the reporting period, incidents of excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against alleged attackers, protesters and bystanders had resulted in Palestinian deaths and injuries; some of those incidents appeared to be cases of extrajudicial execution.

3. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as at mid-October 2016, Israeli forces had been responsible for the death of 83 Palestinians and injuries to 2,978 in the occupied West Bank, and for 8 Palestinian deaths and injuries to 184 in Gaza in 2016. Although many of those incidents reportedly involved attacks perpetrated by young Palestinians, or security raids into the homes of Palestinians suspected of involvement in such attacks, a significant number had also been reported to have taken place in the context of clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces. At least 17 cases of extrajudicial executions, including executions of children, had been reported since October 2015. The Israeli Government must ensure that national security forces acted proportionally and with restraint, in accordance with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. Israel should also investigate all cases of alleged excessive use of force and ensure accountability for those responsible.

4. Equally disturbing and lesser-known Israeli practices associated with the occupation included the tendency for Israeli security forces to withhold, purportedly because of security concerns, the bodies of Palestinians they had killed, in what could only be described as a punitive practice. In some cases where bodies had been released, Israeli authorities had reportedly imposed conditions such as the prohibition of autopsies and limitations on funeral rites. Israel had also reportedly demolished or sealed at least 37 homes since October 2015 to punish relatives of Palestinians who attacked Israelis or were suspected of such attacks, leaving dozens of innocent Palestinian families homeless and displaced. That and other punitive practices constituted a form of collective punishment, which was a clear breach of international law and must be ended.

5. An emerging issue of particular concern were threats against and intimidation of human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), particularly in the occupied territories. Incidents had involved hacking of e-mail accounts, threatening anonymous letters and phone calls, repeated arrests on spurious charges, intimidation and

even death threats. Most recently, the Israeli Government had reacted to a briefing of the Security Council by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem by calling for the United Nations to stop funding an extremist organization.

6. The report also raised concerns about the narrowing separation of powers between the judicial and executive branches in Israel, with implications for the independence of the judiciary. There was a profound lack of confidence in the ability of judicial mechanisms to pursue accountability for alleged violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

7. The situation of Palestinian detainees remained a serious concern. There were an estimated 7,000 Palestinian detainees held in Israeli custody, including 340 minors, 56 women and 6 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Special Committee was especially concerned by rising numbers of Palestinians arrested for posting allegedly incendiary comments on social media platforms, which raised questions about the excessive restrictions placed by Israel on the freedom of expression and opinion.

8. An estimated 700 Palestinians continued to be held under indefinite administrative detention without charge or trial. Dozens of Palestinian detainees had undertaken hunger strikes in 2016 to protest Israel's practice of administrative detention. Those protests generally ended in negotiated agreements when the detainees' health had become precarious, but that was not an acceptable outcome. Israel must either release administrative detainees without delay, or promptly charge or prosecute them with all the judicial guarantees required by international human rights law and standards.

9. The report also covered the situation in Gaza. Two years after a devastating escalation of hostilities, donor pledges for reconstruction had yet to be fulfilled, and an estimated 85,000 Palestinians remained displaced. All economic indicators pointed to chronic de-development over the past nine years. Daily power outages affected every aspect of life for families in Gaza, from refrigeration of food to hospital services. The rate of unemployment among young people and women was extremely high, while Palestinian energy dependence and Israeli exploitation of Palestinian natural resources weighed further on the economic situation. It appeared that Israeli enforcement of access-restricted areas off the coast of Gaza not only adversely impacted the livelihood of Palestinian fishermen but also ensured that Palestinian oil and gas reserves remained undeveloped.

10. Discriminatory Israeli policies in the occupied Syrian Golan relating to land, housing and development continued to benefit settlers at the expense of Syrians. It had been reported that a new school curriculum introduced in the area sought to diminish the Syrian identity and culture and that the Syrian population was excluded from decision-making on how educational institutions were run or what Syrian children were taught.

11. The status quo was clearly unsustainable. The pursuit of settlement expansion by Israel, its practice of administrative detention and collective punishment, attacks against human rights defenders and human rights organizations, and lack of accountability for human rights violations would only hasten further escalation of the conflict. The international community should redouble its efforts to find concrete options for peace and to bring an end to the occupation, because the time to reach a two-State solution was running out.

12. **Mr. Gilmour** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General under the current agenda item, said that the report on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan (A/71/355) drew attention to various developments, including the retroactive approval of what the Israeli Government had once considered to be illegal constructions by settler groups, as well as to the dramatic increase in demolitions since systematic documentation had begun in 2009.

13. The situation created by Israeli settlements in the city of Hebron was also examined in depth. Years of systematic violations of human rights had created an environment that forced many Palestinian families to leave the area, in what could amount to forcible transfers. Seventy-five per cent of all businesses in the Old City had had to close, and 42 per cent of homes in the same area had been abandoned. Some 1,500 Israeli soldiers had been deployed to ensure the security of the approximately 600 Israeli settlers living in the heart of the Palestinian community.

14. The report detailed specific OHCHR-monitored cases of excessive use of force and unlawful killings, including possible extrajudicial executions, carried out by Israeli security forces. There appeared to be a disturbing practice of systematically delaying the provision of medical assistance to wounded Palestinian suspects following attacks on Israelis. Hebron had been the focus of many movement restrictions for Palestinian traffic and the sealing of entire neighbourhoods over the past year, which in some cases might be considered a form of collective punishment prohibited by international law. There were frequent incidents of settler violence against Palestinians which, when combined with the lack of accountability, exacerbated the already dire living conditions. Arrests, intimidation, office raids, and even death threats by settlers and Israeli security forces against international, Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders and organizations were regular occurrences. The adverse impact of Israeli settlements within Hebron on Palestinian security and standard of living was striking and, should Palestinian families continue to leave, Israeli settlement there would likely expand, further aggravating already deteriorating living conditions for the remaining Palestinians.

15. The report on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (A/71/364) covered the upsurge in violence that had begun in late September 2015 and highlighted the lack of accountability for violations of human rights and humanitarian law by Israeli forces. The report stressed that the 10-year blockade of Gaza undermined basic human rights, economic prospects and essential services, and exacerbated poverty. In the wake of growing despair and frustration, the many Israeli practices that amounted to collective punishment of Palestinian communities must end. For their part, authorities and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza should also ensure respect for international humanitarian law and accountability for all violations.

16. The report on the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/71/315) outlined the activities undertaken by the Secretariat, including the Department of Public Information, to support the work of the Special Committee.

17. The report on the applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories (A/71/321) summarized the responses received from the Permanent Missions of Brazil, Cuba, the Syrian Arab Republic and the State of Palestine to a request for information about steps taken to implement General Assembly resolution 70/88.

18. The report on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/71/392) was a compilation of responses received from Member States to a request for information on steps taken to implement General Assembly resolution 70/91. In addition to the response from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic, replies had been received from Qatar and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

19. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that her delegation rejected any attempts to portray as one-sided or biased the reports before the Committee or other relevant reports that depicted the critical human rights situation in Palestine accurately. On the contrary, those reports examined the situation through the clear lens of the Charter of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

20. A number of Israeli and multinational corporations had business ties to Israeli settlements, thereby enabling and profiting from their growth, in contravention of international laws and standards as reflected in the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. She asked the Chair of the Special Committee what measures businesses and their home States could take to disengage from complicity in Israeli violations of human rights and international law in Occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem.

21. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) asked the Chair of the Special Committee to compare the socioeconomic opportunities of Palestinians in the occupied territories to those available to settlers living in the territories illegally.

22. **Mr. González** (Nicaragua) asked the Chair of the Special Committee to elaborate on his references to the Israeli use of force against Palestinian civilians and the increase in extrajudicial killings, and to provide

examples of instances in which the victims had represented no threat to others.

23. **Mr. Cita Nugraha** (Indonesia), referring to Israeli policies that compelled Palestinians to leave their homes, asked the Chair of the Special Committee what implication such policies had for the livelihood, fundamental freedoms and human rights of Palestinian residents and how the international community could prevent conditions from worsening.

24. **Mr. Rivero Rosario** (Cuba) asked the Chair of the Special Committee to elaborate on the psychological and socioeconomic impact of the de-development of Gaza on its population, as well as the continued ability of the population, in particular women and children, to deal with the situation.

25. **Mr. Ben Sliman** (Tunisia) asked the Chair of the Special Committee whether such acts as the demolition of homes and the prevention of family reunification could be part of a deliberate policy of the occupying Power against Palestinian civilians and, if so, what might be the underlying motivation for such a policy.

26. **Ms. Yánez Loza** (Ecuador) asked for details on the situation of child detainees, in particular the penalties administered, including stoning, and prolonged house arrest and imprisonment. She also requested details on draft legislation concerning the forced feeding of Palestinian prisoners undertaking a hunger strike.

27. **Mr. Ramírez Carreño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) asked what steps could be taken to ensure a safe work environment for human rights defenders in the occupied territories.

28. **Mr. Perera** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chair of the Special Committee, said that, as the Special Committee recommended in paragraph 96 (d) of its report (A/71/352), the international community must ensure that private corporations respected human rights and had no commercial transactions with bodies linked to settlements or the exploitation of resources in the occupied territories. The Special Committee had received evidence regarding the practices of some corporations, but States also had a responsibility to enact domestic legislation and provide guidance to businesses on the risks of potential complicity in the maintenance and expansion of illegal settlements. Due diligence was the responsibility of companies and States, and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights provided the appropriate framework for taking necessary measures.

29. With regard to trade, full implementation of the recommendations contained in the 2013 report of the independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, should be the starting point for Member States seeking to comply with their obligations. OHCHR had been mandated by the Human Rights Council to implement resolutions following up on the mission's report. All Member States must ensure that trade relations did not contribute to the maintenance of settlements considered illegal under international law.

30. The Special Committee had heard extensive testimony about the adverse impact of night raids and collective punishment on women and children. The increase in suicide rates and recourse to violence among young people also indicated the adverse psychological effects of such practices and policies. Based on the testimony, the Special Committee had found that those actions were a reflection of true policy rather than isolated incidents. It had also concluded, with regard to the practice of force feeding, that waiting until a person's life was in danger to negotiate a settlement was life threatening and adequate measures must be taken before that point.

31. The Special Committee had also given special attention to the creation of a safe environment for human rights defenders. The decision taken by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem to no longer file complaints against the military enforcement system was significant and reflected a lack of faith in the Israeli judicial system. If other Israeli NGOs were to follow suit, that would seriously undermine the Israeli Government's claims that it had adequate domestic accountability systems in place.

32. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said it was incomprehensible that the injustices of 50 years of belligerent occupation by Israel continued unabated as millions of Palestinians were subjugated by illegal means in a situation that not only undermined international law but also tarnished the international community and the credibility of the

international system as a whole. It was high time for real action, based on conscience, responsibility and the rule of law, to end the prolonged occupation and make peace a reality. Against the backdrop of continued international paralysis, the occupying Power had persisted with its systematic gross violations with full impunity, undermining all efforts to achieve a just peace based on the two-State solution and fulfil the rights of the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III). The international community must be firm in demanding that Israel should comply with its obligations under international law. Given that country's failure to investigate serious violations by its occupying forces, the State of Palestine reiterated its call for international accountability for those crimes in order to end the culture of impunity, deter further violations, bring justice for the victims, and ultimately promote peace.

33. The relentless pursuit of the settlement enterprise in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, by successive Israeli Governments confirmed that the colonial, expansionist agenda mattered more than peace and security. Since 2015, Israel had continued the illegal construction of settlements and a network of Israeli-only bypass roads linking the settlements, flagrantly advancing its plans to colonize and annex more Palestinian land. Palestinian civilians had been forcibly transferred and denied basic services, their homes and infrastructure destroyed. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in 2016 alone, 958 structures had been demolished and at least 1,447 Palestinians had been displaced, including 690 children. There was ongoing obstruction of humanitarian assistance, imposition of movement restrictions and other measures designed to segregate the indigenous Palestinian population from the settler population — privileging the latter — and to alter the demographic composition of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in absolute defiance of the international community's calls for a cessation of all such policies and measures. Israel continued to flout international humanitarian, human rights and criminal law, United Nations resolutions, the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and roadmap obligations, in contempt of international consensus that settlement activities undermined the viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. Moreover, the unlawful settlement campaign constituted the main infringement of the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination, as noted by the independent international fact-finding mission on Israeli settlements.

34. The illegal Israeli practices and policies in Occupied Palestine constituted gross violations of the Palestinian people's human rights. During the period covered by the Special Committee's report, military raids in Palestinian population centres had continued, deepening the protection crisis endured by a defenseless people. The occupying forces had killed more than 200 Palestinians, at least 17 of them in extrajudicial executions, and had withheld the dead bodies of Palestinians, denying the deceased and their families their dignity. The occupying forces continued to destroy Palestinian homes and civilian infrastructure in areas marked for settlement expansion in order to create a coercive environment in the form of harsh living conditions for civilians. Furthermore, those forces stood by as extremist Israeli settlers routinely terrorized and assaulted Palestinians in Nablus, Jenin, Al-Khalil, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The Israeli Government fueled settler crimes through hateful rhetoric and incitement against Palestinian people and holy sites, particularly the Haram al-Sharif, threatening to ignite a religious conflict that could threaten the security and stability of the entire region.

35. In the Gaza Strip, the devastating blockade and the destruction wreaked during the military aggressions of 2014 continued to affect human rights and disrupt every aspect of life. The overt collective punishment had led, inter alia, to the chronic de-development of Gaza, where approximately half of the population was unemployed and 80 per cent depended on humanitarian aid. The United Nations country team there had reported that, without remedial action, it was doubtful that Gaza would be habitable by 2020. In addition to depriving Palestinians of sources of livelihood and food by destroying Palestinian agricultural land and restricting access to the Mediterranean Sea off the Gaza coast, the occupying Power had also created an enduring water and sanitation crisis. As West Bank water resources continued to be diverted for Israeli use, the dire state of the water and sanitation infrastructure as a result of the blockade and military aggressions had rendered 95 per cent of Gaza's water supply unfit for human consumption.

36. The repressive occupying Power still detained more than 7,000 Palestinian civilians, including 450 children, with children as young as 12 regularly seized, beaten and prosecuted in the world's only juvenile military court system. The use of violence and torture in interrogations was systemic and medical negligence had resulted in the death of over 200 Palestinian prisoners. Furthermore, Israel continued to harass and intimidate human rights defenders and members of civil society organizations, targeting Palestinian and Israeli NGOs alike.

37. Those policies and practices — approved at the highest levels — showed a systematic pattern of breaches of international law, many of which amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The lives of innumerable victims had been marred by a web of mutually reinforcing violations, which were synonymous and symbiotic with the occupation. Yet, as history had shown, those grave injustices would remain without remedy in the absence of accountability. Nevertheless, the State of Palestine remained steadfast in defending and advancing its just cause through legal, diplomatic and peaceful means. It remained committed to achieving a just and peaceful solution, based on the two-State solution and in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. The international community must act to end Israeli impunity and guarantee a lasting and definitive solution to the conflict. The Security Council and General Assembly had clear responsibilities, as did States and international organizations, which must pursue policies consistent with international law, including by ending all support to the illegal Israeli settlement enterprise. Ensuring the compliance of Israel with the Fourth Geneva Convention, human rights covenants and relevant United Nations resolutions was fundamental for salvaging peace prospects and guaranteeing the Palestinian people their inalienable right to live in freedom, security, peace and dignity in their independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

38. **Mr. Ramírez Carreño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, said that the Movement regretted the worsening human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, and was deeply concerned that Israel had prevented the Special Committee from holding consultations with the relevant Israeli authorities and from gaining access to the occupied territories in line with its mandate. The Movement condemned the Israeli Government's obstinate settlement of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which was a grave violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and various United Nations resolutions, and constituted the main obstacle to peace. The abhorrent Israeli occupation, which remained one of the most destabilizing factors at the regional and global levels, must be ended.

39. The Special Committee's disturbing findings, which showed that the policies and practices of Israel continued to violate the fundamental human rights and dignity of the Palestinian people and other Arabs living under occupation, were a matter of serious concern. The Movement deplored the continuation of Israeli settlement activities through a combination of illegal policies and practices, in particular the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, among them Bedouin and herder communities. Such illegal practices had accelerated, in clear contempt of global calls for Israel to comply with the law and cease all such activities; they were undermining the contiguity of the West Bank, jeopardizing the future viability of the Palestinian State and thus imperiling the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. In July 2016 alone — when the Quartet had issued its report highlighting the destructive impact of Israeli settlement activities and called for a halt to them — Israel had issued tenders for more than 1,000 units in Occupied East Jerusalem and the Gilo settlements and had used several purportedly legal and administrative measures to expand its control of more Palestinian territory, including the declaration of "state land" and seizure of Palestinian land for archaeological and recreational activities.

40. The Movement condemned the current trend of demolitions and evictions carried out by the occupying Power in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It was reprehensible that the monthly average number of structures demolished in 2016 in Area C of the occupied West Bank had almost tripled from 2015. By July 2016, 981 Palestinians had been displaced from their homes in East Jerusalem and other areas in the occupied West Bank. The humanitarian impact went beyond the displacement of the

Palestinian communities deprived of shelter; the destruction of their livelihood increased poverty and dependence on humanitarian aid. Furthermore, the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of Palestine denied Palestinians' right to sovereignty over their natural resources, including water and energy resources, and their right to development.

41. The Palestinians who resisted displacement endured violent attacks and threats to their lives and property by illegal Israeli settlers. OHCHR had recorded 175 incidents of settler violence against Palestinians between June 2015 and May 2016, some resulting in deaths, injuries and substantial property damage. The international community had unanimously condemned such hateful acts against Palestinians and the continued impunity of settlers: between 2005 and 2015 only 7.3 per cent of complaints of ideologically motivated attacks had led to indictments, while 85 per cent of cases had been closed owing to police failures during the investigative process. The international community, in particular the Security Council, must take urgent action and practical measures to compel the occupying Power to abide by all of its obligations under international law.

42. The Movement deplored the continued use of excessive force by Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian civilian population and the suffering caused through the deliberate medical neglect of Palestinian detainees and other illegal practices. It had condemned the occupying Power's unlawful and arbitrary detention and imprisonment of staggering numbers of Palestinian civilians, including children, women and elected officials, and reiterated the call for their immediate release. Israel should immediately cease all violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and fully abide by its legal obligations.

43. The continuing land closure and naval blockade of the Gaza Strip by Israel, currently in its tenth year, constituted a form of collective punishment of the civilian population that directly contradicted the obligations of Israel under international humanitarian law and its responsibility to meet the needs of a protected population under occupation. The myriad economic, social and psychological consequences of the restrictions imposed by the inhumane blockade destroyed any possibility of development and impeded the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Palestinian civilian population. The Movement called upon Israel to end its illegal blockade of Gaza promptly and unconditionally and to open all its crossing points in accordance with international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

44. With reference to the Syrian Golan, the Movement reaffirmed that all unlawful actions perpetrated by Israel, as well as recent statements by that country claiming sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan, constituted clear violations of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant resolutions, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981). Israel must abide by that resolution and withdraw completely to the borders of 4 June 1967. At its recent Summit, the Movement had emphasized, inter alia, the urgency of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. All parties concerned must make a concerted effort to that end. The Movement reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to the immediate restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination in an independent and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to a just solution for the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

45. **Mr. Chatzisavas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Ukraine, said that, as his delegation had stated at the last open debate of the Security Council on the Middle East, it was gravely concerned about the trends on the ground, which threatened the viability of the two-State solution. In recent months, there had been an acceleration of negative trends, in direct contradiction to the recommendations in the 2016 report of the Quartet. There was a risk of an entrenched one-State reality of perpetual occupation and conflict incompatible with the realization of the national aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis alike.

46. For the European Union, there was no alternative to a negotiated political solution based on the parameters set out in the European Council conclusions on the Middle East Peace process, dated December 2009 and July 2014, which met Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty.

47. The European Union was extremely concerned by the escalation of violence and tensions in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory. It condemned all violence against civilians and acts of terror and insisted that perpetrators of crimes or acts of terror should be brought to justice. The security forces' response needed to be proportional and consistent, regardless of the identity of the perpetrator. Israel must conduct thorough investigations of cases in which lethal force had been used. Compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law by State and non-State actors was a cornerstone of peace and security in the region. Alleged violations and abuses by all sides must be investigated in accordance with international standards. The European Union was also concerned about recurring tensions at holy sites and renewed its calls to uphold the status quo established in 1967.

48. The States members of the European Union had never recognized the annexation of territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. All discriminatory treatment of Palestinians in East Jerusalem must end and the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States must be resolved through negotiations.

49. The European Union recalled its long-held position that settlements were illegal under international law. Since early 2016, and particularly since the publication of the Quartet report in July 2016, expansion of Israeli settlements had accelerated. The announcement by Israel in September 2016 of its plans to construct 98 new housing units, in what was effectively a new settlement that further threatened the contiguity of a future Palestinian State, had drawn wide condemnation from the international community.

50. Other policies had a negative impact on the socioeconomic development of Area C, which was crucial to the viability of a future Palestinian State. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had illustrated that Israeli demolitions of Palestinian structures in Area C, including structures funded by the European Union and its member States, had risen significantly in 2016, leading to evictions and the threat of forced transfers, including of Bedouin communities. A fundamental change of policy by Israel with regard to the occupied Palestinian Territory, and particularly to Area C, was needed to prevent the irreversible loss of the two-State solution. Enabling accelerated Palestinian construction and the social and economic development of Area C would strengthen the prosperity and security of both Israelis and Palestinians.

51. The European Union and its member States reaffirmed their commitment to implementing existing legislation and bilateral agreements on settlements and ensuring that all agreements with Israel explicitly stated their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. Of particular concern were such measures as punitive house demolition, the closing off of Palestinian villages and the withdrawal of work permits, which could amount to collective punishment. He recalled applicable international humanitarian law, such as the Fourth Geneva Convention.

52. Militant activity and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza promoted general instability and were liable to lead to renewed conflict. Fundamental improvements in living conditions were needed, particularly for children and the elderly. While all international donors should promptly honour the pledges made at the Cairo Conference, Gaza's humanitarian needs could be properly addressed only through political progress. To that end, all sides must respect the ceasefire. Indiscriminate attacks were illegal and increased the risk of escalation, threatening the lives of civilians, diverting resources from humanitarian efforts and impeding reconstruction and development. The illicit arms build-up by Hamas and other militant groups must end. The European Union unequivocally condemned all acts of terror and incitement and urged all parties to work towards de-escalating tensions.

53. All Palestinian factions must engage in good faith in the reconciliation process on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and the Quartet principles. A single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority, with full control over Gaza, was critical to achieving a viable Palestinian State. He encouraged setting, without delay, a new date for

Palestinian local elections, which could become an important step towards Palestinian democracy and national unity.

54. The European Union reiterated its call on Israel to end the blockade of Gaza and fully open the crossings while addressing legitimate security concerns. The lifting of restrictions on the movement of people, including representatives of the international community, services and goods — and particularly designated dual-use goods — was needed to facilitate reconstruction, service delivery and international infrastructure projects. Both parties were urged to promote confidence and trust-building measures. In that regard, the European Union welcomed the Israeli-Palestinian electricity agreement concluded in September 2016.

55. As part of their bilateral relationship, the European Union and Israel engaged in regular dialogues on human rights protection. The European Union remained concerned about the extensive recourse by Israel to excessive administrative detention of Palestinians without formal charges, and particularly the high number of Palestinian children in detention and continuing reports of ill treatment during the arrest, transfer and interrogation of child detainees in the West Bank. Israel must continue cooperating with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to ensure that gaps between policy and practice were bridged and that the rights of children in Israeli military custody were upheld at all times. Lastly, Israel must resume its full cooperation with OHCHR and with the Human Rights Council and its special procedures.

56. **Ms. Loza** (Ecuador) said it was regrettable that the Special Committee had been unable to hold consultations with the relevant Israeli authorities or gain access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Israeli Government persisted in extending its illegal settlements unilaterally, building an extensive network of roads and tunnels connecting the settlements and investing financially and politically in industrial zones and tourist and archaeological sites in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Those and other expansionist measures, including new settlements in the West Bank, were part of a deliberate policy to prevent the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State and thereby preclude the two-State solution.

57. The fact that Israeli law applied to Israeli citizens who entered or lived in the Occupied Palestinian Territory while Palestinians lived under military law was particularly distressing as it meant that two populations living in the same land were subject to different and unequal legal systems, under the authority of a Government that served the one at the expense of the other. Such was the reality entrenched by half a century of foreign military occupation, making it all but impossible to imagine the two-State solution coming to fruition. The inability to enforce United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine and the indifference of the world Powers directly involved had become further entrenched as well, undermining international attempts to settle conflicts in the region.

58. As the thirtieth anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development approached, the General Assembly had a vital role to play in ensuring that the Palestinian people were allowed to exercise that legitimate right. A number of international legal instruments and United Nations resolutions, reports and recommendations could serve as tools to prevent the further dilution of a negotiated two-State solution — the only path to attaining lasting peace and the aspirations of both peoples. Her delegation urged Israel to cooperate with the Special Committee and to refrain from disdaining international law and the opinion of the community of nations that, year after year, demanded an end to its illegal expansionist settlement policy.

59. **Mr. Elshandawily** (Egypt) said that his Government was particularly concerned by the well-documented cases, cited in the Special Committee's report (A/71/352), of excessive force by Israeli security forces, including extrajudicial killing. Any observer could not help but be outraged at the incident of an Israeli army medic fatally shooting a Palestinian in the head after the latter had been wounded and neutralized. The report described many cases of collective punishment, a recent surge in arrests and detention, and a lack of accountability and civil remedies. The Secretary-General's report on the Syrian Golan (A/71/392) painted an equally grim picture of the situation in that area. Overall, the reports portrayed a disturbing picture of the conditions endured by Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied territories, and the Special Committee indicated that measures taken by the Israeli Government to address many of

those issues had not led to significant improvements in accountability.

60. His Government had made its opposition to Israeli settlements very clear in the General Assembly and the Security Council. The overwhelming consensus of the international community was that the continued building and expansion of those illegal settlements jeopardized the peace process and the two-State solution. The self-protection measures implemented by settlers and Israeli occupation forces made normal life nearly impossible for Palestinians. In that regard, his Government fully supported the recommendations set out in the Secretary-General's report on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan (A/71/355).

61. Ending the occupation and implementing the two-State solution was the sole path to achieving peace and eradicating one of the root causes of the many challenges currently faced by the Middle East. To that end, the international community must work together and look beyond immediate and short-sighted political gains.

62. **Ms. Meitzad** (Israel) said that the Special Committee's report was no more than a collection of unsubstantiated rumours and baseless allegations. It was unfortunate to see United Nations funds spent every year on a product that lacked credibility and a discussion that lacked context. The Special Committee's work did not contribute to creating the conditions necessary to establish meaningful dialogue and bilateral negotiations aimed at ending the conflict.

63. The report did not include any reference to Hamas, the internationally designated terror organization that had terrorized and imposed its brutal policies on the Gazan people. While it cited the Quartet report, it did so selectively and in a deliberately distortive manner, excluding that report's harsh criticism of Palestinian officials' ongoing incitement to terrorism and of the continued violence against Israeli civilians. While the Special Committee expressed concern about the ongoing violence on the ground, it referred only vaguely to Israeli casualties.

64. Since fall 2015, there had been a rise in Palestinian terror attacks and a constant incitement to violence. That wave of violence had already taken the lives of 42 Israelis and injured 577 — facts that had been omitted from the report. That very day, a Palestinian police officer had opened fire at a checkpoint outside the West Bank city of Ramallah, injuring three Israeli soldiers. Hamas had immediately issued a statement praising the attack and had encouraged Palestinian security services to carry out similar ones. The only attack on Israelis mentioned in the report, namely the abhorrent killing of Israelis in Tel Aviv in June 2016, was not labelled a terror attack and was only mentioned to further the accusations against Israel. In addition, the report contained no reference to the ongoing incitement against Israelis or the shameful statements by the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, such as his 2015 statement on the Al-Aqsa mosque, which showed a complete disregard for the history of the Jewish people and intolerance towards other religions. Such statements promoted a false historical narrative and only moved the parties further away from peace. Israel, in contrast, had always strived fervently to protect the rights of all its citizens — Jews and Arabs alike — and had enshrined those rights in its Declaration of Independence.

65. The report also criticized the entire Israeli judicial system without any justification. That judicial system allowed every individual, Israeli or Palestinian, to turn directly and in the first instance to the Supreme Court on any matter and enjoyed a well-established international reputation. Unfounded allegations proved once again that the true purpose of the report was to lambast and harm Israel. Furthermore, the report encouraged the boycotting of Israeli businesses in the name of freedom of expression — a shameful pretext for introducing extremist anti-Israel rhetoric into an official United Nations report.

66. The section of the report dealing with the rebuilding of Gaza did not mention that United Nations officials had commended Israel for its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of a workable mechanism for the reconstruction of Gaza, and instead quoted ungrounded accusations from unnamed civil society organizations. Also omitted was the fact that Israel was taking significant steps to help the residents of the Gaza Strip.

67. Israel had been working closely with the Organization to facilitate the Gaza Reconstruction

Mechanism. Renovation of over 81,000 houses had been completed and 20,000 were currently being repaired, and over 800 public projects had been authorized by that mechanism. Some 800 trucks passed through Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings every day. Israel had facilitated the transfer of over 6 million tons of building materials for reconstruction projects funded by the international community. All types of foodstuffs entered the Gaza Strip without restriction. Only weapons were prohibited and a short list of dual-use items required a special permit.

68. In the first half of 2016, exports of goods from Gaza had increased by 10 per cent, to almost 9,000 tons. Israel had taken additional measures to improve the well-being of Palestinians, granting entry permits for urgent medical care. In 2015, over 130,000 Palestinians had crossed into Israel for medical purposes, including more than 31,000 from Gaza, while over 6,700 tons of medical supplies had entered the Gaza Strip. The number of Palestinians working in Israel had risen and their income benefited 100,000 households, stimulating an additional $1.3 billion worth of economic activity in the Palestinian Authority. Despite the ongoing threat posed to Israeli citizens by rocket attacks launched by Hamas, Israel had demonstrated its commitment to economic expansion policies to improve the humanitarian conditions and standard of living of the civilian population while safeguarding the basic security needs of its citizens.

69. Israel categorically rejected the Special Committee's mandate and work, and called on the countries that believed in peace and dialogue to vote against the resolution supporting that Committee's mandate.

70. **Mr. Al Ali** (United Arab Emirates) said that the Special Committee's latest report confirmed that Israel had continued its illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan, including settlement expansion, incessant violence by Israeli settlers against the Palestinians, the destruction of Palestinian property, land confiscation, the forced displacement of Palestinians, the excessive use of force by Israeli forces against Palestinians, the continued blockade of Gaza, the deteriorating situation of Palestinian prisoners, including children, and the exploitation of natural resources in the occupied Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights. Moreover, Israel continued its acts of provocation, racial incitement and illegal tampering with holy sites.

71. Those practices had led to deteriorating humanitarian, economic and social conditions for Palestinians and the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. The unemployment rate had risen to approximately 40 per cent in Gaza in 2016 and the Palestinians' despair and hopelessness were spreading. The situation was exacerbated by the recruitment and exploitation of young people by terrorist and extremist groups. It was therefore necessary for Israel to cease all practices that were in flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

72. His Government was concerned about the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and the absence of an imminent and just solution that would restore their inalienable rights to the Palestinian people. It called on the international community and the Security Council to take all necessary steps to save the two-State solution and put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, so as to enable the Palestinian people to live a normal life and achieve the progress and prosperity to which they aspired. Achieving stability and security in the region was the key to finding a just and lasting solution that allowed Palestinians to establish their independent State on the basis of pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital under the relevant resolutions and in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and the Madrid principles.

73. Lastly, his Government hoped that the Secretariat would increase its support to the Special Committee, given its vital role in documenting the suffering of the Palestinian people and exposing Israeli violations against them. The international community must exert pressure on Israel to cooperate with the Special Committee's members and grant them access to the occupied Palestinian territories in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

74. **Mr. Alruwaished** (Kuwait) said that his delegation commended the Special Committee for its diligent work despite the restrictions imposed upon it by Israel, which refused to cooperate with its investigations. The report of the Special Committee showed that Israel was continuing its systematic

settlement expansion in defiance of international law and internationally recognized resolutions. The Palestinian people's standard of living continued to deteriorate, exacerbating its suffering. Blatant Israeli aggression against the innocent population of the Gaza Strip had obstructed access to basic goods and services, creating a humanitarian catastrophe. Kuwait urged the Security Council to compel Israel to halt its aggression and implement internationally recognized resolutions. Israel must be held legally accountable for the human and material damage and losses its brutal policies had inflicted upon the Palestinian people. Its systematic racism against Palestinians, plunder of their possessions and holy sites and illegal blockade against the Gaza Strip must cease, and crossings into the territory must be reopened to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its inhabitants. His delegation once again called on Israel to withdraw from the Syrian Golan Heights and from occupied Lebanese territory, in accordance with Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

75. Israel persistently dismissed the international community's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its bid to establish an independent State. The international community must therefore openly declare its solidarity and compel Israel to cease its brutal aggression and uphold its obligations under international law. The continued construction of settlements and other acts of provocation by Israel had sabotaged efforts to revive the peace process and find a just and definitive solution to the question of Palestine, leading to a dangerous escalation that imperilled regional security and stability. His delegation endorsed the request by Palestine for international protection for the Palestinian people and called on Member States, particularly Security Council members, to back the Palestinian bid for full United Nations membership. Kuwait stood ready to continue extending moral, political and material assistance to the Palestinian people in the legitimate defence of its just cause, until the Israeli occupation of Arab lands came to an end and an independent Palestinian State was established, with East Jerusalem as its capital. His Government welcomed the resolution adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declaring the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem a Muslim holy site of worship and affirming that the Haram al-Ibrahimi/Tomb of the Patriarchs and the Bilal ibn Rabah Mosque/Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem were an integral part of Palestine.

76. **Mr. Rasool** (Iraq) said that the occupying Power's continued aggression against the Palestinian people demonstrated its disregard for international law and United Nations resolutions. Therefore, it was the international community's duty to employ all peaceful means to compel Israel to end its illegal occupation and to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination and establish an internationally recognized State within 1967 borders. The international community must also urge the United Nations to exert pressure on Israel to grant the Special Committee access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations assisting the Palestinian people.

77. Colonialist settlement — a war crime under international law — was one of the ugliest forms of terrorism. Israel continued to demolish Palestinian houses, bomb and arbitrarily detain civilians, build settlements on Palestinian land and impose racist laws in an attempt to create new facts on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It was the occupying Power's duty to provide judicial safeguards to detainees inside the Territory, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, it must abandon its attempts to change the demographic composition of Jerusalem.

78. His delegation condemned the occupation of the Syrian Golan by Israel since 1967 and the imposition of its laws in the territory since 1981, in violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which had declared the annexation of the Syrian Golan by Israel to be null and void. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was an international conflict in respect of which international humanitarian law — particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocol on non-international conflicts — and international human rights law were applicable. Furthermore, the international community and the United Nations, the guardian of international peace and security, had legal and political responsibilities with respect to the conflict and the Palestinian people pending a final settlement of the question of Palestine.

79. The increasing international recognition of the State of Palestine, with its accession to international organizations and covenants, should be translated into

policies aimed at putting an end to the arbitrary practices targeting Palestinians and stressing the viability of the two-State solution. Iraq was a staunch supporter of the rights of the Palestinian people and their claim to establish an independent State in the Palestinian territories with Jerusalem as its capital. Lastly, he called for Palestinians to be provided with international protection.

80. **Ms. Sughayar** (Jordan) said that the main reason for the increase in violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was the distressing persistence of illegal Israeli practices as part of a systematic policy, in defiance of the will of the international community and in violation of international law. That behaviour had cost both peoples many opportunities to fulfil their aspirations to attain peace and security. The racist aggression of Israeli settlers exacerbated conflict, deepened divisions and spread a culture of hatred.

81. It was not too late for Israel to learn from past lessons, heed international calls to reassess its policies and act on the desire for peace that it had expressed in international forums. Israel must realize that peace could not come until its words were backed by clear, earnest action and a genuine belief in the two-State solution as the only way to enable the two peoples to live side by side in security and stability.

82. Hollow protestations that Palestinian violence was primarily responsible for hindering the peace process were unacceptable. Her Government would welcome an explanation of the extent to which such violence was linked to Israel moving forward with the construction of settlements. Their illegal expansion on Palestinian land was the main obstacle to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. Only by resolving to end the violence and create conditions conducive to peace could Israel facilitate the resumption of serious negotiations. The blockade of the Gaza Strip and the house demolition, land confiscation and forced displacement of Palestinians from their homes had stoked tensions. The Israeli Government, as the occupying Power, bore full responsibility for all violations of international humanitarian law. Regrettably, Israel continued to deny the Special Committee access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Her delegation hoped that the Israeli authorities would cooperate with the Special Committee and enable it to discharge its mandate.

83. Jordan would remain at the forefront of efforts to end the Israeli occupation and to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its legitimate rights, chief among them the right to establish an independent State. Her country would also continue to resist any attempts to change the historical status of Islamic and Christian holy sites in East Jerusalem, in particular the Haram al-Sharif/Al-Aqsa Mosque, using all diplomatic, political and legal options at its disposal, based on the historic Hashemite Kingdom's guardianship of Islamic and Christian holy sites. The resolution recently adopted by UNESCO called on Israel, the occupying Power, to allow for the restoration of the historic status quo, under which the Jordanian Awqaf Department had exercised exclusive authority over the Haram al-Sharif/Al-Aqsa Mosque, and for its mandate to be extended to all affairs relating to the unimpeded administration of the Haram al-Sharif/Al-Aqsa Mosque, including maintenance, restoration and regulation of access. The resolution also affirmed the importance of the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls for the three monotheistic religions and expressly stated that nothing in the text should affect the legal status of East Jerusalem as a city under Israeli military occupation or the clear obligations of Israel as occupying Power under international law.

84. Countries that opted to maintain political neutrality on the question of Palestine would neither serve the interests of Israel nor help the parties to settle the conflict. Such a settlement would pave the way for the resumption of genuine, effective and specific negotiations within a time frame leading to a two-State solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. Only by ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian State would regional security, acceptance of the State of Israel and coexistence with the Palestinian people and other peoples in the region be achieved.

85. **Mr. Mounzer** (Syrian Arab Republic) said his delegation had hoped that the Secretary-General's report on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/71/392) would have been more comprehensive, instead of merely relaying the information already presented by his Government and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Security Council resolution 497 (1981) had declared that the decision by Israel to impose its

laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Syrian Arab Golan was null and void and without international legal effect. Israel had responded to the Organization's repudiation of its occupation by expanding its flagrant violations of international law. Without the backing of certain States with hegemonic influence in the United Nations, that country's policy of aggression would have been thwarted.

86. In the Syrian Golan, the Israeli authorities continued to carry out systematic human rights violations that included racial discrimination and arbitrary arrest, including the re-arrest of a Syrian activist for having exposed Israeli support for terrorists in the area of separation in the Syrian Golan. Moreover, Syrian residents of the Golan who resisted the occupation — a right protected under international law — were sentenced to long prison terms following a show trial. His delegation urged the international community to make every effort to obtain the release of all Syrian prisoners languishing in occupation prisons.

87. The occupying Power had fined and arrested Syrian citizens of the Golan who had attempted to visit their relatives in their home country. Arab villages were isolated from one another and the infirm who were unable to pay the cost of treatment were barred from traveling to Damascus to receive free medical care. In addition, Israel prohibited the construction of homes by the Syrian citizens of the Golan on their own land and had demolished a number of homes belonging to Syrian citizens, on the pretext that they had not obtained construction licences.

88. Israeli cultural violations included the plunder of archaeological sites by occupation authorities, the imposition of an Israeli educational curriculum on Syrian students and the replacement of many Syrian teachers with Israeli teachers. Violations of the rights of Syrian citizens of the Golan included control of their land and resources as part of a concerted effort to destroy their livelihoods. Occupation authorities had seized over three quarters of the total area of the occupied Syrian Golan, most of it agricultural land, for use by the military. Settlements, toxic waste landfills and wind turbines had been built on the land, and the extraction of oil and other natural resources was under way, in violation of the Hague Regulations, which forbade the exploitation of natural resources in occupied territory. Furthermore, Israeli occupation authorities controlled groundwater resources and stole over 400 million cubic metres of water from the Golan each year, diverting it for use by Israeli settlements and selling it at prices nearing a dollar per cubic metre for irrigation. Syrian citizens of the Golan were also prevented from trading their agricultural products in their home country of Syria.

89. The acts of aggression perpetrated by Israel would foster unprecedented tensions in the region and beyond, particularly as that country's support of the Nusrah Front and other terrorist groups had become public. His delegation therefore urged the United Nations to take immediate action to end the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and have it withdraw to the 1967 borders, in accordance with the relevant resolutions.

90. **Mr. Rivero Rosario** (Cuba) lamenting the enduring plight of the Palestinian people after more than 50 years of illegal foreign occupation and the policies and practices of Israel that violated international human rights and humanitarian law, said that the reports of the Secretary-General and the Special Committee provided abundant, inescapable evidence that the flagrant human rights violations continued unabated.

91. It was regrettable that the Security Council had not succeeded in reaching an agreement to bring an end to the aggressive, colonialist policies and practices of Israel and stop the trampling of the rights of the Palestinian people. Given the alarming inaction of the Council, Cuba called once again on that organ to fulfil its Charter-mandated responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Failing that, Israel would continue to entrench the occupation, undermining the viability of the two-State solution and a just and lasting settlement of the conflict.

92. Cuba welcomed regional and international efforts aimed at a resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians, and reiterated that the only possible solution to the question of Palestine was the peaceful coexistence of two independent States, with an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, within the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Cuba firmly supported the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations and

called on the Security Council to make a recommendation in that regard. If the Council failed to do so, the General Assembly must act decisively.

93. Every day, the international community was made aware of shameful and horrible statistics on the murder of Palestinians, including children, arbitrary detentions and escalating violence, while settlement construction continued apace in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and occupied Syrian Golan as Palestinians were evicted from their lands. The blockade was ubiquitous, stifling the economy and increasing hunger, unemployment and poverty. That was no way to achieve the international peace and security that the world desired and for which the Palestinian people longed.

94. Cuba reaffirmed its unwavering support for the Palestinian people and called for an end to the prolonged and unlawful Israeli occupation of Palestine, the immediate and unconditional lifting of the cruel and illegal Gaza blockade and the opening of border crossings and checkpoints. Greater efforts were needed to resolve the dire situation of Palestine refugees, in accordance with the norms and principles of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

95. **Mr. Zhang** Dianbin (China) said that the Middle East was plagued by unabated local conflicts and rising terrorism with pronounced spillover effects, which were a cause for serious concern. The international community should remain united in urging the concerned parties to practice tolerance, beat swords into ploughshares and give peace a chance so that the people of the region could at last live in tranquillity. The question of Palestine lay at the heart of Middle East conflicts and would continue to weigh on world peace and stability if left unresolved. Safeguarding the legitimate national rights and interests of the Palestinians was the common responsibility of the international community. Continued violent conflict and an unconscionable humanitarian disaster had made it all the more urgent to put an end to that situation.

96. At present, Palestinian-Israeli peace talks remained deadlocked. Both sides should exercise restraint, prevent escalation of the conflict and take concrete steps to strengthen mutual trust, build consensus, address their differences and work to break the impasse so that talks could resume and positive outcomes could be reached. The international community should not stand by while the Middle East peace process stalled, but rather should take action and push for the early achievement of a two-State solution.

97. The international community had recently implemented a range of new ideas in that regard. China commended every effort conducive to diffusing tensions and achieving the two-State solution. It was firmly committed to the just cause of the Palestinian people and worked tirelessly to advance the peace process. In January 2016, in an address to the Arab League, the President of China had reiterated the country's unequivocal support for restoring the legitimate national rights and interests of Palestinians and called for the rekindling of the peace process and for greater progress in rebuilding their economy. In June 2016, the Chinese foreign minister had attended the Middle East Peace Initiative ministerial conference in Paris and had put forth a Chinese proposal for a solution based on "three stops" and "three explorations".

98. In 2016, China had donated 50 million yuan to improve the livelihoods of the Palestinian people. His Government would continue to play a constructive and active role in pushing for a viable solution to the conflict. It consistently advocated for respecting the political systems and pathways chosen by the Palestinian Government and people and encouraged all parties to resolve their differences through dialogue in pursuit of a lasting and sustainable settlement. To that end, the international community should uphold the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and the basic standards governing international relations. China supported a greater United Nations role in resolving that conflict and rejected external military intervention or a solution imposed by force. The international community must adhere to uniform standards and take appropriate action to counter terrorist threats. A holistic approach should be taken to address the symptoms and root causes of the conflict, improve people's livelihood through development, consolidate the capacity for economic and social governance, foster a culture of tolerance and create conditions conducive to lasting peace and stability.

99. **Ms. Dris** (Malaysia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, year after year, Israel had numerous opportunities to engage with the Special

Committee and clarify its position so that the international community could understand its perspective. Instead, Israel had not even recognized the Special Committee and had obstructed its visits. Her Government deeply regretted that Israel had not taken those opportunities in good faith and looked forward to engaging with it when it acted in accordance with international law and the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.